

Altar-ing:  
Con mucho cariño  
de San Antonio a Chicago



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**More than simply archives, these collections suggest modes of critical documentation and memory that bridge multiple polarities. Constituted through both practice and theory, they are intensely personal but also invested in collective transformation.**

**María Coterá**  
**“Nuestra Autohistoria: Toward a Chicana Digital Praxis”**  
**2018**

From San Antonio to Chicago, and all around the world, la cultura cura. Cultural traditions, ancestral knowledge, and creative traditions are worth excavating, celebrating, and remembering. Now is the moment. Latinx Heritage Month isn't one month per year. It's siempre.

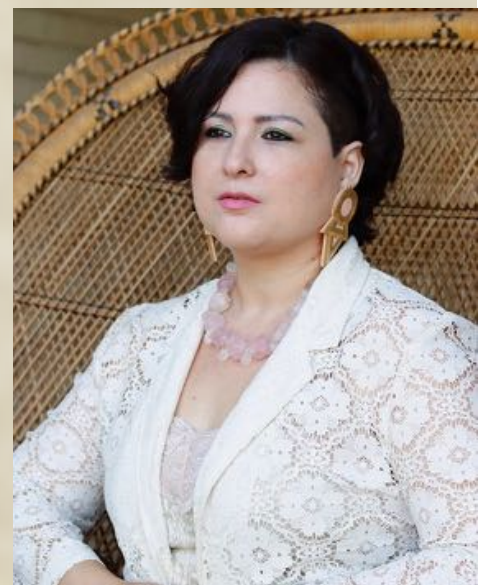
This publication is the culmination of Altar-ing: A Latinx Creative Nonfiction Zine Workshop, a two-part series I adapted to teach online during the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic. I took the original workshop, first presented at the Latino Collection and Resource Center of San Antonio Public Library in 2019, and altered the objectives to better meet our times and our mixed group of participants from Chicago, San Antonio, Brooklyn, and a few places in between.

Home, many of us have learned, is sacred. And altars can be anything, really. Anywhere ritual and arrangement and intention meet—that's an altar. This project is about remembering the history of altars, the brain science of memory, how creative nonfiction writing and Latinx music activates ancestral/cultural healing, and how we need to archive ourselves digitally and in real life as an antidote to erasure.

Why do we need altars? How do they help us heal and alter? What's an archive? And who decides what stories get to be preserved?

Our first session, entitled Missing Our Muertos, is my attempt at addressing the global pandemic, ongoing wars, climates in crisis, executions in the streets and in darkened bedrooms, how can we NOT address death? How can we NOT reach inwards, and outwards and upwards, and remember our rituals, our ancestors, our stories?

[1] Say her name conmigo: Breonna Taylor. Saying a name can be a tiny altar.



## Here are my working definitions of altar, archive, and zine as they pertain to the altar-ing project:

**Altar:** structure built for prayer, worship, sacrifice, and lovingly arranged with cositas, relics, flowers, food, photos, offerings, and objects representing memories of beloved muertos. Altar-ing is the opposite of amnesia.

**Archive:** collection of historically or personally significant primary source documents and records that are saved, organized, and preserved over a lifetime, such as letters, recipes, mixtapes, artwork, photographs, files, scraps, and diaries that prove existence. Archiving is the opposite of erasure.

**Zine:** DIY publication preserving and sharing knowledge, stories, and creative offerings made by hand in small batches.

Altar-ers were encouraged to develop the work produced in our sessions, request editorial feedback if desired, and polish submissions for publication. In this zine you will find:

1. Playlists of songs that help “bring our muertos home,” as I say in my WFMU radio show also called Missing My Muertos. Participants created collections of music meant to be a mixtape, soundtrack, an altar of songs for their muertos that they also published on platforms like Spotify and Youtube. Some wrote a “mic break” dedicating the mix and, in effect, sending a supernatural shout-out to long-gone friends, ancestors, heroes/icons, and even places that no longer exist. Some even designed their own mixtape cover art!

2. Altar-ers also submitted sacred family photos that capture important moments in their family’s history and wrote captions placing the photos in time. In addition, they submitted selfies as a way of documenting themselves and show readers now, and fifty years from now, who they are. They also wrote their own short bios because doing so is a way to archive oneself in the card catalogue of life!

3. I based the second workshop on a lecture I presented at University of Texas at San Antonio in Spring 2021 entitled Save As: Archives, Altars, Art, & Autohistoria in the Digital Age y Después (you can stream it on Youtube).. If an archivist is an information professional who assesses, collects, organizes, preserves, maintains control over, and provides access to records and archives determined to have long-term value, it is important that we recognize the long-term value of our archive. We can be our own archivists. Some altar-ers submitted a photo of a personal archive or one of their collections, lovingly arranged and displayed

4. We read Gabrielle Calvocoressi’s 2021 poem, Miss you. Would like to take a walk with you, and used its bones as a frame for our own poem about grief and longing. These “miss you/wish you” poems are also an attempt to transform family photos into words and imagery.



Early on, I decided to commission cover art from Lizett Carmona, who goes by Frijoliz, a Chicago artist and mother whose grandparents migrated to Texas as braceros, and whose art is an example of archiving in the digital age.

Right away, Carmona sent me a Venn diagram of similarities between Chicago and San Antonio, two cities with strong Latinx (particularly Mexican) influences and history. Both cities are famous for iconic water features built into city structure and economy, Lake Shore Drive and the Riverwalk. Y'all have the Bulls and we have the Spurs. We both have world-famous performing arts scenes, cruising and lowrider culture, famous Mexican food spots, and, most intrinsically, a long history of labor exchange: "Initially, enganchistas, labor recruiters, worked in Northern Mexico and parts of the U.S. Southwest to recruit Mexican laborers. Migration accelerated in the 1920s as word spread of ready work in Chicago and as industry successfully lobbied to exempt Mexicans from the restrictions of the 1924 Immigration Act" (Encyclopedia of Chicago).

Her art depicts two hermana deities in homage to famous "sister" paintings and depicting cultural linkages between the two cities. In Carmona's words: "I had a really therapeutic time making this piece. I really got into the importance of archiving and used some photographs to make a collage that's really personal to me. I added some San Antonio gems in the graffiti on the border wall as a shout out to your city, but focused more on migrant labor the cities have in common and I referenced some images I found digging around on Chicago and Texas Mexican labor."

Carmona's artwork is a poignant representation of this facet of the Altar-ing project and I am proud to present it as our cover. You can learn more about Lizett Carmona at [www.frijoliz.com](http://www.frijoliz.com).

I'd like to thank everyone who participated in the workshops and submitted such thoughtful work to this zine. GRACIAS to Chicago Public Library, especially Greg Rodriguez, Daylily Alvarez, and Jaime Bravo for giving us the opportunity to learn and create together. Celebrating and preserving Latinx Heritage, and always centering our Indigenous and Black fam, is something we strive for twelve months a year!

You can find me at [www.bonniecisneros.com](http://www.bonniecisneros.com), my own personal archive. I'll repeat it otra vez: Chicago to San Anto, and all around the world, la cultura cura!

This zine is a collaborative altar and archive of music, images, and palabras that exemplifies the theme for Latinx Heritage Month 2021: **pa' lante con nuestro poder, moving forward with power!**

We hope you are moved by the immense heart and creativity presented on these pages and are inspired to build altars and archive yourself.

always altar-ing,  
Bonnie Ilza Cisneros



**Together Again**  
by Enedina Iréne

**Even after all of the bad,  
all of the sad,  
all of the hurt,  
all of the pain,  
all of the sorrow.**

**I carry each and every single one of your strengths,  
and scars,  
with me always.**

**Always in my heart,  
is my love for you.  
When I think of you all...**

**I,  
cry for you,  
pray for you,  
heal for you,  
fight for you,  
go on for you.**

**I will love you always,  
always and forever.**

**Always do I feel you in my heart.  
Always do I feel you in my soul.  
Always do I feel you in my core.**

**All the good things  
All the love,  
not the numbness we learned to know,  
but the undoing of that vicious cycle of abuse.**

**I hold my arms open for you,  
the way you once did for me.  
They way I know in my heart,  
you always will.**

**One day I will heal with you,  
all of us,  
when I too,  
become an ancestor,  
and the scars I carry,  
cannot wait.**





**The first song on this playlist is Ain't No Mountain High Enough by Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell and is dedicated to every single survivor in my family that has had to overcome trauma and abuse. Abuse by those who should have been protecting us rather than harming us.**

**To those who abused themselves after, in an attempt to forget, while trying to survive:**

**I see you.**

**I am you.**

**I love you.**





**In Spirit**  
**by Gladys Carillo**  
Grief in my heart;  
From not knowing you,  
Longing for a land I do not know.  
But your spirit  
And the land always finds me.  
In prayer, in meditation,  
You are here with me.  
In spirit-  
I travel to the homelands,  
Feel the sun on my skin,  
I hear your whisper,  
I feel your embrace.



### Collections photograph: Cositas y Recuerdos

I have always loved jewelry, the pieces in the photo are meaningful to me. They've been with me for so long!

The silver turquoise bracelet belonged to my tia Virginia who passed away from cancer when I was five years old. My memories of her are of a creative woman, I recall her sewing dresses for my primas with a cast on her arm, she was also a painter. I still remember where her funeral service was held. The bracelet inspired the painting for the Dia de los Muertos exhibit I participated in 2008. I feel she's with me whenever I wear it.

During my teen years, I was really into sun and moon imagery. I have had these pieces since, and still wear them. They were gifts from my Mom from her trips to Mexico. The jewelry is displayed on my favorite bag that I've also had since about the same time as the jewelry pictured. I remember the day mom bought it for me. I grew up in La Villita (Little Village) , a mostly Mexican immigrant neighborhood in Chicago. We were walking along 26th Street- a vibrant commercial strip filled with shops, restaurants etc, . There were a few older ladies selling their work on the sidewalk. I faintly remember them wearing embroidered blouses. I've had to replace the lining once since then, as the original one got worn out. The bag is still in great shape, you wouldn't know I've had it since the late 90's!



### Photo descriptions

I feel the biggest spiritual connection to my maternal grandparents and the small town where my mom grew up. My grandparents passed away before I was born. Their names are Flavio and Julia Terrazas. As a child, we lived there for a short period of time. I have not been there since, the population is much smaller now. Unfortunately, I do not know the dates the photos were taken.





### Playlist dedication

It was a daunting task thinking of songs to dedicate to muertos I did not know. Ancestral veneration is part of my spiritual practice. I gave them offerings and prayed for guidance in putting this playlist together. It is a combination of songs from my personal playlist for them. I play these songs at my altar when giving them offerings, other songs I was intuitively drawn to. To my muertos- con mucho amor.



Mariana Vasquez

**Band On The Run Wings**

**Eres Tu Mecedades**

**Hey Julio Iglesias**

**Venus Frankie Valli**

**Love and Kisses**

**Designer Music Lipps Inc.**

**I Feel Love Donna Summer**

**Melina Camilo Sesto**

**Rung Of Fire Johnny Cash**

**Nadie Sepa Mí Sufrir Sonora Dinamita**

**Amor Eterno Rocio Durcal**

**Celebration Kool & The Gang**

**New York, NY Liza Minnelli**

**El Chorrito Cri Cri**



**Magic Please Mic Break**

Taking this little mic break to send a virtual shout out to Norma  
All the way hasta la mas alta del cielo.  
I want to dedicate Band on the Run by  
McCartney and Wings  
to you in gratitude for gifting me with your  
love of music.

This song takes me to the days we'd drive  
to Mexico.

At some point on our way to San Lui,  
the radio would lose reception and we  
would sing .

We'd go silent  
ya que la carretera era de puras curvas y de  
subida.

Looking out into the night  
we'd see the reflective crosses gathered to  
mark souls from wrecks.

You were always so comforting.

You would start singing in your beautiful  
voice.  
and make us feel safe.

This is for you, Norma





**Miss you. Would like to Call You Hasta El Cielo.**

**by Mariana Vasquez**

***Based on Gabrielle Calvocoressi's poem***

Do not care if you give me goosebumps  
Would love to dance and laugh with you. Miss you.  
Would love to make you proud of my survival.  
Like you used to help support me when you were on this plane.

Love to smell you as I hug you. Feel talcom soft skin of your arms.  
You look so young. The evening gloves make you so polished.  
Miss you.

Would love to come fill the house with lights tinsel and everything shiny. A  
lovely evergreen tree for your holiday for the party to celebrate and welcome  
el año nuevo. We'll light three candles wish and pray for the world. For peace.  
Bring yourself. I'll prepare the flautas. I'll make the best chile. We'll drive past  
the tostada place

And you can laugh about your Cockney accent.

Wish you. Wish you could just quote Dickens

Don't forget the line, I'll remind

You. I know you know it even though. I'm

sane – ish now. Getting way more better-er.

I'll show you my little Madre Santa.

I'd like to call you & make you laugh but if you  
want to watch Hyacinth Bouquet and can't? I'll watch it for you.

Miss you.

Cried at the altar with your picture in my sketchbook  
in San Antonio weeks ago. Miss you in your nice vestidos.

They're all a memory now. I can bring you new ones  
if only you'll promise to love the color.

Know I still wear black.

It was inevitable. Know I am not gonna kill myself these days.

It was my grief from losing you. Why'd you wanna leave us?

You always gave so much comfort to people who needed some kindness and  
outshined it all. Wish you would forgive me for that time about the haircut. You  
deserved better.

Clear out the sorrow with a love light.

Come through hard.

Flash the sky luminous. Bright.

ETERNAL.

# Anthony Prater

INTRO/DEDICATION: This playlist represents people who have gone before us, and special times that have passed. Some left slowly, some left suddenly. The feelings still remain, and they themselves remain alive in my memories. I'm happy that we existed at the same time and got to cross paths. As you read these words and listen to his playlist, know that I am happy that you exist.



1. Tito Guizar - Allá En El Rancho Grande (For Ignacio)
2. Bill Withers - Grandma's Hands (For Victoria)
3. Roger Whittaker - The Last Farewell (For Calvia)
4. West Side Story - Somewhere (For Yolanda)
5. Los Lobos - La Bamba (For Oralia's House + The VHS I wore out)
6. The Pixies - Greens and Blues (For time well spent... and well wasted)
7. Benjamin Todd - We ain't even kin (For friends and chosen family)
8. Daniel Johnston - Some things last a long time (For Dan... a sweet soul)
9. Sir Douglas Quintet - At the Crossroads (For Originals everywhere)

10. Oasis - Don't look back in anger (For those who left with things unresolved)
11. Descendents - When I get old (For Young Anthony)
12. Longwave - Tidal Wave (For a Love when it was young and new)
13. Buddy Holly - True Love Ways (For the same Love that will never die)
14. The Specials - Enjoy Yourself (For everyone and the time we have left)
15. Juan Gabriel - Amar Eterno (For Everyone who ran out of time)

For Those Who Have Gone,  
And The Times They Took With Them.  
For Us Left Behind,  
And The Time We Have Left.

C/S

A Collection of memories.  
Anthony C. Prater. 2021.

TAPES (EACH)	RECORDING BOTH DIRECTIONS							
	100 FT.	200 FT.	300 FT.	400 FT.	500 FT.	600 FT.	700 FT.	800 FT.
1/2 IPS	30 min.	1 hr.	1 1/2 hrs.	2 hrs.	3 hrs.	4 hrs.	5 hrs.	6 hrs.
3/4 IPS	20 min.	40 min.	60 min.	80 min.	100 min.	120 min.	140 min.	160 min.
1 IPS	15 min.	30 min.	45 min.	60 min.	75 min.	90 min.	105 min.	120 min.



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**TITLE: The Collected Works of Lambo II**

**DESCRIPTION:** My paternal Grandfather, Calvin D. Prater (1935 - 2010) was an artist in his free time from 1950s until his death; he would sign most of his works as Lambo II. His reason for choosing this name was because growing up in the 1930s, his mother's pet name for his older brother was "Little Lamb #1", making him "Little Lamb #2. When my wife and I moved into his former house I inherited the bulk of his works and I'm in the process of dating, cataloging, and preserving them.



**DESCRIPTION:** Photo#1 is of my maternal Great-Great Grandparents Maxamino Medrano Hernandez (1878-1948) & Maria Cruz Garcia Hernandez (1877-1959) along with Great Great-Tios, Tias, and Primos. The photo was taken at the land owned by John Easterly located on the old Rockport to Castroville Road in the community known as Oak Island (Present Day Loop 1604 South in Von Army), formerly the Heermann General Store & Valmont Post Office. They were sharecroppers on the property from 1910 to 1939. The photo was taken in April of 1920 so my Great-Great Grandmother would have been 2 months pregnant with my Great Grandfather Ignacio G. Hernandez (1920-2013), he was born in that same building on December 31st of that year. I live about 5 minutes away from this property and am happy that I get to see it often.







Photo#2 is of my maternal Great Grandparents Olivia Solis Hernandez (1918-1974) & Ignacio G. Hernandez (1920-2013) with their children Maxamino (B.1941), my Grandmother Oralia (B.1943), Alma (B.1946), Oscar (B.1954) & Samuel (B.1952) on his 45 acre Farm & Cattle Ranch on Stevens Rd. near Somerset. The photo taken sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s, he purchased the property upon returning from service in World War II (1944-1945).

#### POEM

by Anthony Prater

To those who I have known  
And those who I never got the chance to know  
Those who existed long before  
And those who do not yet exist  
I love you all the same  
All of your good, and all of your flaws  
Your ethic, and your vices  
The good times, and the bad  
I'm grateful for the time we got to have  
I have lost, but do not feel deprived  
I have grieved, but I am not sad  
I wished to keep you forever, but you were never mine  
We don't belong to each other, we belong to time  
The time-shared has enriched my existence  
Our journeys, though they may be different  
But the destination is the same  
You have not died, because you live in me  
You exist in every breath I take  
Every drop of blood  
Every sip of coffee  
Every bite of food  
Every sunrise & sunset  
Every thought that enters my brain  
Everything is everything...I celebrate your names

## Roxanne Garza



**Dear Nana.**

**I miss you everyday.**

**As I sit here and think of you: my eyes are beginning to swell and tears are filling. These aren't sad tears, but happy ones. I want to thank you for everything. Everything. My earliest memories of my life are filled with nothing but you and these memories are ones I will cherish until the day I come home. Thank you for showing me love and patience: you never did let me down.**

**You showed up for me in many ways. I can not thank you enough.**

**I wish life would have given us more time. I can not wait until the day we meet again and you make me scrambled eggs for breakfast and brew me coffee to drink. We're going to sit down and catch up for days.**

**Songs**

**Gladys Knight & The Pips - Neither One of Us**

**Grupo Mazz - No Te Olvidare**

**Gladys Knight & The Pips - Midnight Train to Georgia**

**Selena - No Me Queda Mas**

**Gladys Knight & The Pips - Best Thing That Ever Happened To Me**

**Ramon Ayala - Un Puno de Tierra**





Abuelita at her surprise birthday party, 2016

Abuelita's Playlist:

Title of playlist: "Paloma Blanca, Paloma Negra"

Track List

1. Fotos y Recuerdos –Selena
2. Rhythm is Gonna Get You –Gloria Estefan
3. La Vida Es Un Carnival– Celia Cruz
4. The Girl From Ipanema– Frank Sinatra
5. The Way You Look Tonight– Frank Sinatra
6. Fly Me to the Moon– Frank Sinatra
7. It's Now or Never–Elvis Presley
8. Can't Help Falling in Love with you– Elvis Presley
9. Se me olvido otra vez –Juan Gabriel
10. Paloma Negra –Chavela Vargas
11. Volver, Volver –Vicente Fernandez
12. My Way– Frank Sinatra



Carole Gonzalez

Short Dedication/introduction to Abuelita's playlist:

In the "Paloma Blanca, Paloma Negra" playlist you get a glimpse into the life of Blanca, a woman whose name meant white but who looked best in black. A woman whose presence made John Wayne stop his limo just to talk to her. My abuelita. She refused to speak English and refused to be defined. She was a heartbreaker. And a world traveler. A jokester. And a mother. And she did it all -- her way. El punto.



**Abuelita on the plane flying to Mexico, the 70s**

**“Miss you. Would like to go with you”  
by Carole Gonzalez**

**... Do not care if you want me to wait  
while you find the perfect earrings to  
match your new dress.**

**Would love to sit in your kitchen and  
sip steaming café with you while you  
tell my mom the latest chisme  
happening in the complex.**

**Miss you. Would love to make you a  
fresh pot. Careful. Don't spill a drop.  
Keep it pristine. Just like you did.**

**Your sea foam green and aqua vases  
lining the wall partitions and letting the  
sun rays shine through like a  
kaleidoscope on your table. Te  
extraño.**

**Love to hear the music playing from your TV. Your favorite novella. Your sofa-- orchestra seating.  
Or the record spinning in your treasured wooden player.**

**Dusted and waxed. The one us children were not allowed to touch.**

**But were welcomed to listen to, and you turning around and telling us the name of the singer and  
the song as if we should be writing it down.**

**I remember you always looking away in photos, smirking. Intocable. Or looking directly into the  
soul of the cameraman. There was no in-between with you.**

**Miss you.**

**Would love to listen to Juan Gabriel with you. Come in hand with my best Spanish, that I practiced  
for you, and mi hijo.**

**Bring the fire and the sun. We'll drive past your old houses.**

**And you can spin us stories of each one. Tell stories just like my mom. She learned from you. The  
severe intonations like deep dives into the water. !Si! You would tell us. !“Alla!,” pointing to the  
place where something happened with your elegant, long fingernails. Bringing the tips of nails to  
your lips to hide your laugh at how ridiculous it sounded.**

**My mom driving, listening to translate for me, and pausing to exclaim “!No Mami!? Alla!?” As she  
pointed too, and me waiting in suspense.**

**But my Spanish will be better this time. ¡Te lo juro!**

**Wish you. Wish you could come back and teach my son Spanish.**

**Don't need to teach him las letras o los numeros. I will. I'll buy more bilingual books and we can take turns reading to him. I promise to make sure he sits still to listen. He can sit on the floor on a blanket. And you. There. On our new blue chair.**

**You. I know you like your great-grandchildren. Even though.**

**They're older now. Loud-er. I'll take you my baby boy. Let you see him again. He likes to keep things tidy too. You'll laugh at how he loads the washer so well. Helps me vacuum.**

**I'd like to bring you white roses, Blanca, and fresh tacos from Norma's. But if you want me to, I'll take you to Woodlawn.**

**I'll pack some sweets. I won't tell my mom or the tias.  
Miss you.**



**Abuelita at  
Fiesta TX,  
the 80s**

**I can meet you at the spot when your old apartment use to be at the corner of Brooklyn and St. Mary's. Across from the old Pik Nik my mom would order "dos tacos de chicharron and a Coke" and you with your water bottle you brought from home because you're not going to spend any money.**

**Miss you in your cotton dresses that make you look like imported silk, hair pin curled.**

**They're here now. I can bring you some earrings I know you will love.**

**If only, you'll meet us there. Know I didn't plan for everyone to come, but they wanted to see you too. And you know how it is, they wanted it to be a surprise. Turned into a party. Usted sabes?**

**It was the cousins who planned it this time. Know I only told Alfonso. But he told Carmen and she told Sandie, and Sandie told Michael, and he told his mom, and she called Aunt Linda who told Aunt Teddy who called my mom, and I think the other cousins saw on Facebook somehow, and well...**

**It was supposed to be a surprise.**

**Why'd you think anything different? You know how it goes with us.**

**You always forget how we will turn it into a celebration. We learned that from you. Wish you would join us.**

**Come out your apartment door. Come through the windows like the sunlight always did in your home. Float through your glassware the colors of ocean. Sit with us for a while. While we share stories over steaming café de olla. And each of the tias bringing their nails to their lips to cover their laughter because the tales are so ridiculous maybe they shouldn't show their grandchildren they're laughing.**

# Rosemarie Rodriguez

This playlist is dedicated to my muertos who I miss and the ones I've never had a chance to meet. The songs I selected represent my childhood. I grew up in Arizona, Texas, and Las Vegas. To sum things up: I grew up in bars and midways. I listened to these songs in the back seat while on a family road trip to Texas and I remember listening to my dad play music early Sunday mornings while cooking breakfast. These memories are now burned into my memory, forever. Thank you dad for sharing your playlist with me. Yo soy Mexicana, Native, y Tejana and proud.

<b>Mi Nena</b> Little Joe	<b>I'd Rather Go Blind</b> Etta James
<b>Las Nubes</b> Little Joe	<b>Shower the People</b> James Taylor
<b>Si Una Vez</b> Selena	<b>Wild World</b> Cat Stevens
<b>Rinconcito en el Cielo</b> Ramon Ayala y Sus Bravos del Norte	<b>Fire and Rain</b> James Taylor
<b>Ocean Front Property</b> George Strait	<b>Operator</b> Jim Croce
<b>I Cross My Heart</b> George Strait	
<b>Always My Hero</b> Little Joe	
<b>Blueberry Hill</b> Fats Domino	
<b>Kansas City</b> Fats Domino	
<b>Wasted Days and Wasted Nights</b> Freddy Fender	



Collection/Archive:

I collect rocks and miniatures. Growing up I always fancied rocks and was inclusive of all shapes and colors. It didn't matter if they were dirty or shiny, I would dust them off, give them a little rinse and keep them on my altar. Back then I didn't realize I was creating my first altar. It was about the memory and that moment in time that I wanted to collect. Miniatures are something I fell in love with because of my grandma. She always had something strange or cute that was petite. This is my altar. Can you spot something tiny?





This is a photo of my paternal ancestors. From left to right: Olivia Rodriguez (great aunt), Alberto Rodriguez (grandfather), Cleofas Rodriguez (great, great grandmother), Antonio Rodriguez (great uncle), y Manuel Rodriguez (great, great grandfather). They are all deceased, except for my uncle Tony. This photo was taken circa 1948 in Michigan. My family were migrant farm workers. Shortly after this picture was taken my great, great grandmother contracted Tuberculosis (TB) and passed away. This is the only photo I have of her and my great, great grandfather.



I miss you.

by Rosemarie Rodriguez

I do not care if your clothes are full of dirt.

Would love to sit with you.

Miss you.

Would love to make you a feast like you would gather when you were in the fields.

Would love to shake hands with you and honor your hard-working hands.

Miss you.

Would love to walk to the heavens with you. You can bring the blue sky.

We'll gather flowers past the fields and you can remind me about your last day.

Wish you.

Wish you could take a nap. Don't worry, I'll take over the work in the fields for you.

But, I know you won't let me.

I'm strong now. See, I'll show you my strength.

It's time for you to rest now.

I'd like to honor you by continuing your work.

God's work.

I will take action for you.

Miss you.

I see you at the fields with your courage in hand.

I miss you with your handkerchiefs, they're my accessory around my neck now.

I can bring you a special one if only you'll keep it safe forever.

Wish you could see I have your high cheekbones and your dark skin.

It was meant for me.

Know I accept it. It was meant for me.

Ask uncle Tony.

He calls me Tattoo.

Mi grand abuelita Why'd you travel so far from home?

I hope you will stop and enjoy your last day.

Now, it's time to forget about the dirt.

Throw it out the window and come through the flowers of the earth now.



**Letter to my brother, José Ángel San Miguel**  
**by Carmen Vela**

José,

*Because you were seven years older than me, you rarely acknowledged my existence.*

*Mom told us how you'd never wanted siblings. I was 13-years-old visiting our grandmother in Múzquiz, Coahuila when you died as a result of a freak work accident; you were three weeks away from turning 20.*

*You died on July 10, 1969, and you were buried on July 13, 1969. While Americans and the world were mesmerized with the astronauts landing on the moon, my parents were in deep shock and disbelief. Drowning in sorrow.*

*The morning you died, my grandmother was at the washboard, and I was sitting talking to her. At one point I remember telling her that I felt I couldn't catch my breath, like someone was sitting on my chest. I told her your wife had invited me to go stay with you and her and her sister in New Mexico when I went back home. (I was hoping that once there you'd buy me a Polly Pocket Doll like the fancy one you'd bought your wife's sister).*

*Once you'd met your future wife, your relationship with our parents became contentious. When you fell in love, you forgot to respect our mom and dad. Anyway, that's how it seemed to our parents. Mom cried a lot. You wouldn't even eat supper with us. You'd walk across the street to your future wife's house as soon as you showered after work. Your wife's mother planned your wedding and even helped you rent a trailer (mobile home) behind our parents' backs. Our mom was so hurt and lost. You had been her estrella, her todo.*

*Eventually, you and your wife moved to New Mexico where you and our dad were working for the same company. Your son was born on October 25, 1968. Three months later, your daughter was conceived. She was born October 4, 1969, three months after you died.*

*When my grandmother and I received the news of your death later that afternoon, I was perplexed. Had I received a message of your impending death that morning? Were you dying when I felt that tightness in my chest? My grandmother had dreamt you the night before walking her through the house telling her everything was all right.*

*(I do continue to have feelings about those close to me. Like I seem to sense when something is wrong).*

*I mourned your death because I saw how devastated our mom was. We all admired how stoic our dad was because our mom needed him to be that. But he had to be dying inside because he was working nearby with another crew that morning that the electric line behind you broke and landed on your back.*

*He was told you'd lived for a few minutes. He was told you were singing as you climbed the pole. The lines were supposed to be dead while you worked on that transformer. Did you realize you were dying? Did you think of our mom? Did you think of your son?*

*Your wife said that you'd asked for a big breakfast that morning, unusual because you rarely ate breakfast. She said you told her you were so hungry you felt you were going to die. When she walked to the door carrying your son to see you out, you told her to stop doing that. That you didn't want him crying when you left. Had you felt all along you were going to die young? You had been in such a hurry to have a family, to be an adult.*

*I realize now at 65 years of age that I didn't truly mourn the loss of you when I was 13.*

*Last weekend, when I decided I'd write about you, I suddenly couldn't stop crying. I'm crying right now as I write this to you. I'm so overwhelmed by what your death means. I hadn't thought of it deeply throughout my life. When I met people and they asked about my family, I'd say, "I have 3 sisters. I had a brother who was 7 years older than me, but he died young, and he didn't like us."*

*Now I know that as we aged and experienced milestones, you and I would have had a relationship. Your friends told us you liked to drink and have a good time. I know we would have shared a few beers. We would have danced.*

*José, you'd be 73 years old. I mean, your friends are still alive. All I can say is that my heart and body hurt processing this. I'm missing all we would have shared.*

*Your sister,*

*Carmen Vela*



## Collection

The walls in my bedroom had been bare since 2006 until the Siempre Verde posters were created by Bonnie Cisneros and her artist friends / collaborators. The Siempre Verde posters have brought me joy, hope, peace and a reconnection to my culture during the ongoing pandemic. The playlists she curated and her musings on IG have pulled me off the ledge so many times since 2020.

I own the 9 Selena cup collection thanks to my sister Erma who stood in line to purchase them over the span of 3 years (even during the early onset of the pandemic).

Community activism and local art stickers, political and social justice signs remind me of my responsibility to those around me and to those who are struggling in this capitalist society we live in.

The small items on my medicine cabinet put a smile on my face when I get ready in the mornings.

I cherish handmade items or items that reflect people's culture. Look closely and you'll see the FCK ICE ornament that my daughter made for me. She understands how important the issue of immigration is for me.

All in all, I want items around me that keep me grounded in my roots, culture, and core beliefs.

Carmen Vela



My parents loved to dance. They enjoyed music; however, I don't remember the radio or record player playing in the house all the time. My mom told us that my grandmother used to sing Las Golondrinas when she cooked or while she washed, but she stopped singing everything after one of her children died. Mom used to wonder if Cuco Sanchez was only able to star next to beautiful women because he was a great composer of songs. Anillo de Compromiso reminded her of her engagement to my dad. Amargo Licor reminds me of my dad and how drinking was always a part of his life. He was not an alcoholic until after mom died. Then, he drank in an uncontrolled way and denied he drank that much. <<Nada mas tomo 2 o 3 cervezas, MiJa...>> Of course, he hid a liquor bottle in the storage shed. Te Vas Angel Mio was sung at my mom's funeral by the local artist Ruben Castileja (RIP). Throughout all hardships, my parents never stopped experiencing joy in their lives, and dancing was something that they loved doing.

***Canciones a Mis Muertitos***  
**Mis padres y mis amigxs Cindy y Pete**



This album is one of two albums that my parents ordered from Los Angeles to start their English-learning journey. (I don't know who recommended these to them.) The postage mark indicates they were purchased 1962. I must have been 6 or 7 years old when I saw them trying to learn English after one of my dad's hard day of work from dawn to sundown. Something in my young brain clicked at that moment. I could not let them down. I strived always to be a good student because as they always told us La educacion es algo que nadie te puede quitar.

- La Puerta Negra—Los Tigres del Norte
- Anillo de Compromiso—Cuco Sanchez
- Amargo Licor—Los Alegres de Teran
- Si Nos Dejan—Lola Beltran
- La Media Vuelta—Jose Alfredo Jimenez
- Te Vas Angel Mio—Cornelio Reyna
- Mi Piquito de Oro—Ramon Ayala y Sus Bravos del Norte
- Las Golondrinas—Pedro Infante
- We Are Family—Sister Sledge
- Staying Alive—Bee Gees

My friends Pete and Cindy died too soon. We WERE like family. We had so many good times. We worked at the same place as teenagers. We had parties; we'd play Monopoly all night long; we danced in Cd. Acuna, Coahuila, MX at the discos; we supported each other through bad relationships. There were about 10 of us who were inseparable. We all miss Pete and Cindy.

# Altariste/x Bios

Enedina Iréne is a San Antonio-raised poet, prose writer, and spoken word performer. Her works have been featured in Mujer-Centric Zine, St. Lucia, Boundless 2021 anthology and on the Texas Public Radio program, Worth Repeating. When she is not busy working at the library, she likes to drink coffee on the porch with her husband, spend time with her pets, and go on adventures with them. Currently, she is working on her first urban fantasy romance novel titled, My Morning Star, which should be released in 2023.



Gladys Carrillo is a maker who is based in Chicago. She enjoys exploring different creative avenues, with preference for making clothing and visual art. Her work was featured at the National Museum of Mexican Art for their annual Dia de los Muertos exhibit in 2008. She enjoys spending time with her dog Peter

Mariana Vasquez is a multidisciplinary writer of creative nonfiction and other hybrid texts in New York City. Through her creative dedicating of altars for the deceased she honors Antepasados. Using traditional storytelling, she pays homage to those who have come before while noting ancient, pre-colonial, and contemporary elements of art, cuisine, herstory, and culture.





My name is Anthony Prater. I was born in 1985 in San Antonio, TX but I was raised a few miles south in Somerset. I was educated in various Catholic institutions on the South, East, and West sides of San Antonio, the education took (for the most part)...but the religion didn't stick. Early in life I found my true religion, music, and worship at its altar every chance I get.

I love traveling with my wife, hanging out with our pets at our home. I also enjoy conducting genealogical and historical research, as well as writing, recording, and performing music with my bands The Naggins and Hotel Torgo.

Roxanne Garza is a San Antonio, Texas native, born and raised on the city's Westside. She currently resides in Pilsen, Chicago and is a full-time student who is employed with one of Chicago's oldest florist companies. She finds joys in continuously discovering the beautiful city of Chicago and enjoys bookstores, art galleries, art pop-ups, cute coffee shops, good tacos, meeting new friends, and being involved in Black & Brown communities.



Carol Gonzales is a mama first -- and then a writer, educator, and poet. She is the mother of a sweet soul, Leonardo. Her passions and joys are in her son's, her students', and her own epiphanies, learning and celebrating in community, and the love that is familia.



My name is Rosemarie Rodriguez, and I'm from San Antonio, Texas. But, please call me Rose. I am a queer child of god, a lover of animals and plants, an academic librarian, and a Scorpio baby. Seven years ago I despised anything god, but today god is everything to me. I can't explain god in words, just that God is an experience to me, not some man up in the sky. I spend my time talking to my dogs, collecting books I probably will never have the time to read, folding zines, thrift shopping 'til I drop...can't stop, won't stop, stretching my body, and awwing over miniatures. I'm proud of the person I am today. Thank you for reading.



Daughter of immigrant parents: Victor A. San Miguel and Manuela O. San Miguel  
María del Carmen San Miguel—1956 to 1974  
Carmen San Miguel—1974 to 1980 (Shortened because too many forms to fill out by hand first year college. My permanent address had San Francisco in it.)  
Carmen Vela—1980 to present

Presently, I am mom, wife, abuela (guela), sister, and friend. Trying my best to be a kind and giving community member. I wish I had been a fearless activist, but I do what I can.

Earrings: Created by Linda Monsivais Hernandez (elpunoylamano).  
Pictured are my parents on their wedding day.  
Shirt: Created and sold by Daughter of an Immigrant

## COVER ART

**Frijoliz** is the pseudoname for an illegalized person, propagandist/cultural worker who touches on themes of migration, motherhood, queerness and liberation.

Her words: *I had a really therapeutic time making this piece. I really got into the importance of archiving and used some photographs to make a collage that's really personal to me. I added some SA gems in the graffiti on the border wall as a shout out to your city, but focused more on migrant labor the cities have in common. I referenced some images I found digging around on Chicago and Texas Mexican labor.*



Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Bonnie Cisneros, all zine workshop participants, the Chicago Public Library and, CPL's Latinx Services Committee for this opportunity to celebrate the lives of our dearly departed.

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